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ABSTRACT

A study addressed two challenges in American teacher education: (1) the differences in background between a largely Euro-American teaching force and the diverse pupils it serves; and (2) the difficulty of teaching about literacy and culture in responsive ways. Working with a group of teachers, the study used ethnic autobiographies, written by authors to illustrate cultures other than late 20th century white America, combined with a context for discussion around these books new to many teachers--"Literary Circles." Results indicated that, for the teachers who participated in Literary Circles, the ethnic literature and autobiographies became the means for conducting autobiographical studies of their own lives and, in turn, led to changes in teachers' beliefs about literacy, schooling, and cultural identity. Findings suggest that the combined activities of reading, writing, and discussion have the potential to simultaneously foster personal and professional development. Contains 20 references and a 24-item list of works studied in the Literary Circles. (RS)

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Culture, Autobiography, and the Education of Literacy Teachers

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and Susan Wallace, Michigan State University

CIERA Inquiry 3: Policy and Profession
How does teacher participation in a collaborative professional setting influence views of what literacy is and how literacy is learned? What kind of influence will book discussions about multicultural sutobiographies with other teachers have on the teaching of predominantly white, female teachers to an increasingly diverse classroom?

In this report, Florio-Ruane and Raphael et al. address two challenges in American teacher education: (a) the differences in background between a largely Euro-American teaching force and the diverse pupils it serves, and (b) the difficulty of teaching about literacy and culture in responsive ways. Working with a group of teachers, Florio-Ruane and Raphael used ethnic autobiographies, written by authors to illustrate cultures other than late 20th century white America, combined with a context for discussion around these books new to many teachers—"Literary Circles." This study led to changes in teachers' beliefs about literacy, schooling, and cultural identity. The authors conclude that the combined activities of reading, writing, and discussion have the potential to simultaneously foster personal and professional development.

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Culture, Autobiography, and the Education of Literacy Teachers

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with Jocelyn Glazier, Mary McVee, Bette Shellhorn, and Susan Wallace, Michigan State University[1]

Despite continuing efforts to recruit and retain a diverse teaching force, teachers in the United States remain typically young, Euro-American, female, monolingual, and from lower- and middle-income backgrounds. In contrast, their students tend increasingly to be from linguistic minority backgrounds and lower-income families. This disparity is particularly troublesome when teachers work to support language and literacy development (Cazden & Mehan, 1989). Literacy is deeply rooted in cultural experience, and our society presents teachers with a broad and rich diversity of children whose cultural experience may differ considerably from their own. Yet, being members of the so-called "mainstream" and trained within a profession linguistically and socially homogeneous, many teachers find themselves culturally isolated. They lack awareness of the cultural foundations of literacy in their own lives as well as the lives of others. It is difficult for them to investigate complex issues of race, culture, social class, and language diversity. Their professional education typically does not foster in them a sense of culture as a dynamic process whereby people make meaning in contact with one another (McDiarmid & Price, 1990). By introducing and researching teacher-led book discussions of ethnic literature, we hoped to investigate alternative texts and contexts for teachers to learn about the cultural foundations of literacy in their own and others' lives.

To this end, we researched two contexts for teacher learning: a master's course called "Culture, Literacy and Autobiography," and a subsequent voluntary book club, the Literary Circle. Both contexts stressed reading and discussion of ethnic autobiographical literature. In the first, this experience was largely directed by the principal investigators, who are university-based teacher educators and researchers. However, with the subsequent formation of the Literary Circle, the participating teachers took more power and responsibility for learning within the group. As participant observers, the researchers worked collaboratively with teachers to read and talk about literature and document the group's meetings. We used ethnographic and sociolinguistic methods to study participants' learning as they read, wrote, and

talked about compelling personal literature describing the cultural experience. We were interested in teacher learning about both culture and literacy instruction. The study addresses two challenges in contemporary American teacher education: (a) the disparity in background between a largely Euro-American teaching force and the diverse pupils it serves; and (b) the difficulty of teaching about literacy and culture in responsive, dialogic ways.

Our study was also designed to investigate the role alternative texts and contexts might play in improving teachers' learning about literacy instruction. This goal stems from contemporary expectations that teachers will innovate to improve children's literacy development by making instruction more responsive and dialogic. This typically involves changes in (a) *textual materials* (that is, moving from commercially prepared short stories and text excerpts to original literature as a basis for instruction); (b) *curriculum organization* (such as moving from isolated instruction in reading, writing, language, and subject matter to intra- and interdisciplinary teaching); and (c) changes in *roles and contexts* (that is, the teacher moving from controlling topics and turns to assuming a supportive instructional role, while students take greater responsibility for topic selection, discussion, and assessment of their own progress).

These challenges are rooted in the paradox of expecting teachers to teach in ways unlike those by which they are taught. Scholars criticize the form and content of professional education for encouraging teachers to foster learning that is dialogic in nature and aimed at framing and solving complex problems, yet rarely providing teachers opportunities to experience such teaching and learning for themselves (Burbules, 1993). To respond to this challenge, we created and studied a dialogic, literature-based form of professional development. Jerri, one of the teachers who participated in our study (and who, along with all other teachers, is referred to in this report by a pseudonym), registered her interest in this possibility as follows:

> "One of the most important [reasons for participating] for me was. . . as a teacher. . . because it gave me a feeling for what the kids are trying to do in the classroom. Whenever I participate in things my kids do, it gives me a lot more insight [into] what they're trying to do."[2]

Our study combined two prior lines of research. The first focuses on the use of narrative, specifically ethnic autobiography, as a resource for teacher learning about culture (Florio-Ruane & deTar, in press). The second focuses on the pedagogical power of reading, writing, and talking about literature in peer-led book clubs to foster children's comprehension and critical thinking (McMahon & Raphael, with Goatley & Pardo, 1997). We reasoned from these lines of work that teacher-led book club discussions might provide a strategic site in which to foster and investigate teachers' own professional development. We addressed the following three research questions:

(1) What is the nature of the teachers' oral and written participation in book club activities?

(2) How does participation influence their understandings of literacy—its cultural foundations as well as the process of learning from literature?

(3) How does their participation inform teachers' thinking about literacy curriculum and instruction?

The study began in fall, 1995, and continued through summer, 1997. The 10 teacher participants were typical of both the student cohort at Michigan State University and the national teaching force in that they were Euro-American, female, monolingual speakers of English, and from lower- and middle-income backgrounds (National Center for Educational Statistics, 1995). The autobiographies read by the teachers explored identity and power at the group and the individual level. Their authors recount what is lost and what is gained when, upon entering American schooling and public society, they are asked to acquire not only new skills and linguistic operations, but also new perspectives on the world and themselves within it.

The researchers documented the activities that took place in the master's course and subsequent club in five ways: (a) The course instructor (a co-principal investigator) maintained an *Instructor's Journal* detailing both her weekly observations of the class and her ongoing questions, concerns, and instructional decisions; (b) the researchers engaged as participant observers in the course and Literary Circle, writing *field notes* immediately after each meeting; (c) all book discussions were *audiotaped*, and two were also videotaped for analysis; (d) *written texts* produced by the teachers were collected and studied; and (e) all teachers were *interviewed* about the book club experience.

Data collection and analysis used techniques drawn from ethnography and sociolinguistics, including: (a) the gradual refinement of research questions and the inductive development of analytic categories grounded in continuous comparison of data as they were collected (Glaser & Strauss, 1967); (b) triangulation among different kinds and sources of data to crosscheck inferences about participants' understandings (Gordon, 1980); and (c) collaborative analysis of conversations, interviews, and written texts for insights into the ways participants represented their ideas and negotiated them in social interaction with others (Witherell & Noddings, 1989).

Our project was premised on the idea that learning begins and ends on the social plane. As a function of oral and written engagement with others (and with written text), we hypothesized that teachers would experience transformations in their thinking about culture, literacy, and autobiography. We further hypothesized that they would express those transformations in subsequent cycles of communicative activity. Our research therefore examined the social and linguistic "traces" of teacher learning. Approaching this work with a social historical lens (Harre, 1984; Gavelek & Raphael, 1996), we developed a descriptive analysis highlighting changes in participants' ways of communicating with one another about the autobiographies, their own literate and cultural backgrounds, and their work as teachers. Below we describe key findings in three areas: (a) teacher learning in narrative; (b) teacher learning in conversation; and (c) teacher learning about identity. We close with findings about our collaboration as dialogic, literature-based professional development.

Teacher Learning in Narrative

Teachers' responses to autobiographical literature in both the course and the Literary Circle played a primary role in the research we conducted. Teachers often responded to text by telling stories. Analyzing their personal narratives told in response to the published autobiographies helped us understand how participants viewed their own life experiences against those encountered in literature. This was a critical step in their exploration of diversity and difference.

In book club discussions, teachers' personal narratives often functioned to illustrate an idea from the text or build upon a story told by another participant. These stories, typically taken from the speaker's life, were sociolinguistic performances suggesting how that speaker might think about herself in relationship to others or wish others to think about her (Bauman, 1986). For example, in a series of thematically-linked stories about growing up on dairy farms, several members of the book club responded to Jill Ker Conway's *The Road from Coorain*. The dairy farm, while hardly a sheep ranch in the Australian outback, is a point of potential contact between reader and writer. It was a way for these readers to broach identification with a distant author and with one another around the formative role of a rural, agrarian upbringing.[3]

Recently, psychologists, anthropologists, and literary theorists have focused much attention on the power of narrative to define or redefine self and other. Yet even as the potential exists for narrative to be a powerful tool in exploring and transforming identity, stories are limited, particularly when told within conversation (Tannen, 1989). While embedding personal narrative in conversation allowed participants to share views, it also constrained them. For example, narratives told by the white, middle-class women in our study were typically of equivalent length, consisted of a few key events tied to a general summary, and connected thematically with one another. Their length, structure, and content functioned to sustain conversational involvement in the group.

However, participants reported in debriefing interviews that these cooperative narrative patterns of discourse, while enjoyable, sometimes precluded their telling of longer, more complex personal narratives or ones they felt did not resonate with the emerging group theme. In this sense, the forms and function of the narratives inhibited exploration of issues of diversity or difference. Biased toward thematic, structural, and social connection with others in the conversation, the narratives tended to reinforce, even reify, a sense of homogeneity in the group and limit exploration of even modest differences in knowledge, perspective, or values. In short, while narrative played an important role in facilitating book club discussion, it also limited participants' exploration of difference both among themselves and between themselves and the authors of the published autobiographies. These findings raise important questions for further research about how narrative, particularly in multicultural classrooms and curriculum, can support or make manifest participants' learning about difference.

Teacher Learning in Conversation

White, monolingual, middle-class females continue to dominate the elementary teaching force despite efforts to recruit a more diverse cohort. Our research enabled us to think about how to expand the cultural consciousness of white teachers. In two years of book club conversations, we learned a great deal from our collaborating teachers about the conditions which seem to support serious talk about culture. At the beginning of their participation, what was particularly evident in teachers' talk was a sense of "culturelessness." One participant, Jerri, recalled in a debriefing interview after a year of participation, "I was one of those people in the beginning who [thought] I had no culture. There's nothing to me. I've had no experiences."[4]

Jerri's response resonates with work in the field of cultural studies, which asserts that members of the so-called "dominant culture" hold taken-for-granted assumptions of an amorphous monoculturalism (Frankenburg, 1993) and a stance of "color blindness." This social positioning limits their reflection upon and discussion of race, racism, and whiteness (Paley, 1979/1989). Along with this stance comes an informal, unspoken "code of ethics" which denotes how the topic of race should be engaged in public spaces. As the novelist and literary critic Toni Morrison suggests, "in matters of race, silence and evasion have historically ruled" discourse (Morrison, 1992, p. 9). In analyzing conversations in the book club, particularly those about African-American authors and their texts, we found participants gradually more willing to engage difficult topics like race as they became familiar with one another, with book club as an activity, and with diverse authors and texts.

This finding is illustrated by our analysis of conversations around two works by Maya Angelou. What is evident from these two conversations, spaced approximately six months apart, is that difficult topics raised by Angelou are initially avoided in book club conversation. These topics specifically concern racism, social inequality, and sexuality. In our research, we came to call these topics "hot lava."[5] Like the children's playground game, where the goal is to run a course while avoiding spots of "hot lava," book club participants initially tended to approach and then dart away from difficult topics in their conversational interplay. However, despite their efforts, the literature (and the persona of its author) can be a persistent reminder of these topics. Thus, over time, text, and book club meetings, there remain places where the stepping may be hot.

Maya Angelou, a ubiquitous figure in American popular and literary culture, is an author whose voice continued to insinuate itself into the group. Participants had multiple "Maya sightings" which built their sense of kinship with Angelou. Gradually, they began to evoke her and some of the more difficult themes her books address. They forged connections across volumes in her multitext autobiography, and compared and contrasted her writing with that of other African-American female authors (e.g., Zora Neale Hurston, Toni Morrison). Thus they risked reading more—and reading differently—about hot lava themes. Our research suggests that this willingness to risk did not come easily or quickly. Only with sufficient time to negotiate a shared identity as members of the book club did participants appear to break their silence and create for themselves a new "curriculum" for thinking and speak-

ing about what, for white and middle-class Americans, are historically difficult topics.

Teacher Learning About Identity

Our research examined participants' views of their own learning and professional growth, drawing primarily on analysis of interview data and personal writing done by the teachers as part of course and club participation. The teachers reported learning about aspects of identity including professional practice, personal intellectual growth, and participation in literacy as culturally-grounded practice. While we had hypothesized that they would learn about literacy and culture, a key *unanticipated* finding was that teachers reported discovering themselves as "thinkers" as a by-product of their involvement in book discussions. Finding that book club enhanced teachers' experience of themselves as what researchers on white, middle-class American women call "connected knowers" (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986) prompted us to consider the general potential of peer-led conversation in the professional development of teachers.

Repeatedly, teachers talked of the impact participation had on their sense of their professional agency. Specific references were made to creating book club groups in their school setting with other teachers in their building; having the confidence to present their curriculum work locally to colleagues within their school or district, as well as at state and national conferences; and continuing to enhance their own intellectual lives as they met within the Literary Circle to confront those hot lava topics that they had for so long tended to avoid. Analyzing the teachers' writing and interviews for insight into this sense of agency, we identified several clear themes: (a) increased confidence in and expression of their ideas, (b) a new tendency to envision alternative "possible selves" as they thought about their futures as teachers and as citizens, (c) increased desire to pursue learning, and (d) a renewed passion for literature and its ideas. The opportunity to read challenging literature, talk about it with colleagues, and craft (and hear) one another's personal narratives enhanced teachers' sense of themselves not only as teachers, but as thoughtful participants in society.

Another striking result of participation in the book club was teachers' experience of coming to see themselves as cultural beings. As white, middle-class, monolingual females, few in the group initially thought they had any culture to speak of. While not all expressed this directly (though a few actually stated that they "had no culture"), most saw themselves initially as being the "same." Asked, for example, in the initial course to develop vignettes dealing with their own socialization into culture, most drew a blank. Reading the work of authors such as Maya Angelou and Richard Rodriguez further intimidated them. Only over time did differences among themselves emerge which became the source of the discovery that they, indeed, participated in a range of diverse—and very interesting—cultural settings. Some differences were subtle, such as the differences between daughters of farmers and daughters of cattle ranchers (both represented in our group). Others were more distinct, such as growing up Catholic in con-

trast to growing up Jewish. Hannah, for example, described her emerging insights into the diversity underlying her initial sense of group homogeneity, stating, "We might all look very, very similar and very homogeneous, but boy do we come from different places."[6]

As these differences were elaborated within both the published autobiographies and the stories of their own experience, it became easier and more interesting for participants to craft their own "literacy narratives" (Soliday, 1994). In these stories, the teller captures aspects of coming of age within a particular community, tradition, and family by describing the kinds of texts and literacy events encountered or created there. One teacher, Kate, developed a project for herself (extended ultimately to her development of a curriculum project for children) in which she culled "artifacts" of her own coming of age as a woman, a Catholic, and the daughter of farmers. She brought to this documentary work a close analysis of personal books, photographs, and writings.[7] An important part of teacher learning in this project, then, was the gradual construing of "literacy" as more than learning skills and strategies. Literacy came to be understood as a cultural practice, and becoming literate as deeply entwined with the development of social identity.

Toward Dialogic, Literature-Based Teacher Development

If we accept a model of sociocognitive development in which learning occurs and is evidenced by engagement with others (who are alternately peers and more experienced others), we can look for evidence in our study of learning not only on the part of teachers, but also among the project's teacher educators/researchers. We found increased leadership among the teachers over time and a shift in teacher educators/researchers' participation from project leaders/initiators to fellow club members. This shift was, in part, a function of our study's design, which featured the gradual transfer of control from university-based participants to the teachers as they became more experienced reading and discussing ethnic autobiographical literature within the book club format (Au, 1995). But to realize this design required, in fact, learning on all sides and ongoing negotiation among all participants about "who we are and what we are doing." The gradual release of control thus occasioned new and more complex learning on the part of both teachers and the university-based initiators of the project.

As the circle of leadership widened, changes occurred in decision-making about what to read, why to read, and how to read. The multiple voices within the group discursively crafted an emergent, open-ended "syllabus" reaching far beyond the one with which the course had begun. It took the form of an expanding network of linked texts (both oral and written) which were read differently (primarily by citing and referring to texts in different ways over time—moving from the explicitly personal or critical/descriptive to a hybrid of these two ways of reading). While the course provided a conceptual scaffold for this process, the collaboration among teachers, teacher educators, and researchers produced new sociocognitive construction. To highlight the jointly constructed nature of this process, we use the pronoun

"we" below to refer to the learning of researchers/teacher educators as well as classroom teachers. We identified the following five domains of teaming-oriented change occasioned by our collaboration: (a) defining the book club situation, (b) shaping the thematic content of book club talk and text, (c) defining culture in more complex ways, (d) transforming ways of talking and ways of reading, and (e) reaching out to professional communities.

Defining the Book Club Situation

Teachers assumed increasing control of literature discussion as the course became a voluntary club. This involved relocation of the group from a classroom at the university to the course instructor's home, and, finally, to a local bookstore and cafe—a neutral site selected by the teachers which continues to be the meeting place of the Literary Circle. It also involved naming the group, as it moved from class to club, and attendant decisions about when to add new members, when to leave the group, or when to miss a meeting. Related to this was teacher participation in negotiating and planning meeting times in an ongoing way, in contrast to obligatory meeting times preset by the instructor and university calendar.

Shaping Thematic Content of Book Talk and Text

Teacher participants gradually assumed an equal, even proprietary voice in determining the thematic content of the book club. This included selecting books and conversational topics and planning the group's agenda. Here we gradually opened the selection process from initial assigned books to the second semester's suggested books to the second year's group negotiation of books. Related to this negotiation came changes in genre (we included non-autobiographical, nonfiction books as well as autobiographical fiction in the second year) and content (we stressed gender more in the second year than we did in the first). For example, in year two we included autobiographical novels (e.g., *The Kitchen God's Wife*, by Amy Tan; *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, by Zora Neale Hurston); more autobiographies by and about female intellectuals and writers (e.g., *Composing a Life*, by Mary Catherine Bateson; *One Writer's Beginnings*, by Eudora Welty); and books by more than one person from a nation or ethnic group (e.g., China: *Wild Swans*, by Jung Chang and Tan's *The Kitchen God's Wife*; African-Americans: Maya Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* and *Gather Together in My Name*, Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, and Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon*).

Defining Culture in More Complex Ways

Changes in what we read led us to widen the lens in the club's consideration of diversity. It enriched and complicated our investigation of culture to include not only race, class, and gender, but national and international history and politics, family structure, intellectual life, and religion. In many of the autobiographies, these elements of culture were nested in accounts of family history and intergenerational transformation. As such, the literature provided opportunities to compare and contrast people's experiences in different historical periods, societies, gender roles, and social strata, as well as across intercultural contact and transformation (e.g., Richard Rodriguez's *Days of Obligation*, Eva Hoffman's *Lost in Translation*, and, more recently, James McBride's *The Color of Water* and Esmeralda Santiago's *When I Was Puerto Rican*). Gradually, then, the group engaged a more dynamic view of culture as a process lived by people in contact and in time, rather than a static set of characteristics of an individual or isolated group (Florio-Ruane, 1997; di Leonardo, 1984).

Transforming Ways of Talking and Ways of Reading

The changes described above were negotiated in the microprocesses of our conversational responses to text. As participants moved away from the course's more formal book club structure to a looser conversational response, we no longer needed an instructor or formal assessment. Conversational leadership was negotiated more informally from session to session and across periods of conversation within sessions. Hot lava topics became more common. In contrast to our early meetings, we now referred to them by this name and acknowledged their presence and difficulty.

Participants engaged more readily the hot lava issues of class and race through somewhat less forbidding (for this group) doors of gender, cross-cultural comparison, and history. As white women, for example, participants found that they could uncover and discuss sexism more readily than they could uncover racism. Yet books like *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, *Wild Swans*, and *The Kitchen God's Wife* forced us to look at these issues in tandem. Similarly, it appeared easier for us to examine the historical, social, and political dimensions of oppression in distant societies and cultures than in our own. Reading *Wild Swans*, for example, we were easily and deeply moved by the author's account of the damaging effects of oppressive political systems on the Chinese family. Yet we were less able to make this connection in cultural settings closer to home. We were, for example, initially unable to articulate how, in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, the oppression of African-American men and women in the post-Reconstruction American south might have caused profound stress in their relationships with one another. In this case it was far easier to critique individual characters' motives or temperament than to sense the ways in which these were socially, politically, and culturally situated. With the accumulation of talk and texts, however, the group began to draw comparisons and contrasts. Using descriptions of more distant lives and places as touchstones helped us tackle

the more difficult task of considering (and reconsidering) similar issues within our own time or place—especially ones in which we, as white and middle-class people, are implicated.

We found autobiography a more complex genre than we initially expected. At first, we were more comfortable navigating its factual than its fictional aspects. Soon, however, we began to discover that authors told their life stories imaginatively. This became increasingly evident as we encountered the power and popularity of the genre of autobiography in the hands of politically marginalized writers. We began to look closely at the figurative use of language within personal historical accounts and the blurring of boundaries between genres we had once thought dear. Granting that authors crafted their life stories imaginatively helped us to read them critically and, in the process, to examine more critically our own readings and our own organizing personal stories. We thus moved from considering life stories as "museum pieces" to greater critical awareness of them and their tellers.

The Literary Circle continues to meet monthly, and the group's reading, conversation, and learning continue. We are beginning to address issues of our own limited perspectives as white women and the nature and limits of our ability to reason "across difference" in our dialogues with others. Attendant to the shifts described above, we see a change in the kind and amount of intertextual references and connections—the weaving of a tapestry of meaning across the meetings, books, and personal stories heard and told. Among the intertextual connections participants make are the following: (a) links to other books we have read; (b) links to other books participants (but not the whole group) have read; (c) links to children's books; (d) links to films, plays and television programs; (e) links to special events and speakers in the community (a two-way link in which we sometimes seek out an event because of a book we have read and other times choose a book based on an upcoming event); and (f) links to our own personal stories. This shift points to a possible change in comprehension strategies and resources from our initial readings (and book clubs) to our later ones.

Reaching Out to Other Professional Contexts

We find extensions into practice in the following forms: (a) curriculum development for pupils, (b) annotated bibliography, (c) teacher support networks, and (d) increased collaboration within the research team and attendant growth in friendships among smaller numbers of participants across the lines of differing professional roles. We see the desire to go public about the group and to express what is being learned within it. Finally, we see a growing interest among the group members to track and document their own learning within this experience—both to enhance their understanding of what has been happening to them and to learn how this experience might be shared with other teachers and with pupils in productive ways. These sorts of learning experiences tend not to be readily available to teachers in their ordinary work and/or staff development, yet they resemble the higher order learning experiences teachers are expected to cultivate in children.

Conclusion

Despite the study's limitations of scope and scale, as both an investigation of and an intervention into teachers' thinking and practices it yielded valuable case knowledge about the following: (a) teachers' beliefs about literacy, schooling, and cultural identity; (b) the potential of autobiographical study of one's own life and work in the transformation of these beliefs; (c) the potential of autobiographical literature to put teachers in powerful contact with alternative ways of being and becoming literate and to sensitize them to the different ways in which individuals from varying sociocultural backgrounds experience literacy in and out of school; and (d) the potential pedagogical power of the combined activities of reading, writing, and discussion to foster personal and professional development.

Endnotes

[1] The co-principal investigators are listed alphabetically and contributed equally to the work reported here. The project's graduate research assistants are listed alphabetically.

[2] Interview, July, 1996.

[3] Field notes, November, 1995.

[4] Interview, July, 1996.

[5] We are grateful to Christopher Clark for introducing us to this metaphor.

[6] Interview, July, 1996.

[7] Field notes, December, 1995.

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About CIERA

The Center for the Improvement of Early Reading Achievement (CIERA) is the national center for research on early reading and represents a consortium of educators in five universities (University of Michigan, University of Virginia, and Michigan State University with University of Southern California and University of Minnesota), teacher educators, teachers, publishers of texts, tests, and technology, professional organizations, and schools and school districts across the United States. CIERA is supported under the Educational Research and Development Centers Program, PR/Award Number R305R70004, as administered by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education.

Mission. CIERA's mission is to improve the reading achievement of America's children by generating and disseminating theoretical, empirical, and practical solutions to persistent problems in the learning and teaching of beginning reading.

CIERA Research Model

The model that underlies CIERA's efforts acknowledges many influences on children's reading acquisition. The multiple influences on children's early reading acquisition can be represented in three successive layers, each yielding an area of inquiry of the CIERA scope of work. These three areas of inquiry each present a set of persistent problems in the learning and teaching of beginning reading:

CIERA INQUIRY 1
Readers and Texts

Characteristics of readers and texts and their relationship to early reading achievement. What are the characteristics of readers and texts that have the greatest influence on early success in reading? How can children's existing knowledge and classroom environments enhance the factors that make for success?

CIERA INQUIRY 2
Home and School

Home and school effects on early reading achievment. How do the contexts of homes, communities, classrooms, and schools support high levels of reading achievement among primary-level children? How can these contexts be enhanced to ensure high levels of reading achievement for all children?

CIERA INQUIRY 3
Policy and Profession

Policy and professional effects on early reading achievement. How can new teachers be initiated into the profession and experienced teachers be provided with the knowledge and dispositions to teach young children to read well? How do policies at all levels support or detract from providing all children with access to high levels of reading instruction?

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CIERA
Center for the Improvement of Early Reading Achievement

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